

# Imaginary countries for old men

By [Charles Siboto](#)

2 Jul 2012

No Country for Old Men, the title of the Cormac McCarthy novel and its Oscar winning film adaptation by the Coen brothers, echoes the trend I've been noticing in Hollywood for the last decade at least; all the old men (and, to a slighter degree, women) have left our "immoral" contemporary society and have gone to seek their fortunes in fantastical pasts that never were and space-age futures in distant galaxies that we hope will come to pass. What I'm trying to say, in a long and roundabout manner, is that with the rise in popularity of fantasy, science fiction and comic book movies in Hollywood, a niche has been created for old men. With themes and tropes such as longevity, immortality, magic and mutation these genres are a breeding ground for elderly characters running around and being kick-ass. This, of course, means more work and, dare I say glory, for elderly actors. The revolution of the nerds is creating employment for old people, which means no retirement for the wicked, I guess.

## We all love wizards



Dumbledore

The most common manifestation of this kick-assery (yes, that's a word, I promise I didn't make it up) is in the form of wizards. We all can't help but love wizards in some manner; the good ones are what we all wish our grandfathers were in their spare time and we feel the same warmth towards them as most South Africans do towards Nelson Mandela. The evil ones we loathe but secretly want to high five in dark corners for how charming and witty they are.

The late Richard Harris (emotionally blackmailed by his then 11-year-old granddaughter into accepting the role, despite his declining health ) and Michael Gambon brought the stately and, quite conversely, whimsical Dumbledore to life in their portrayal of his character in the Harry Potter films. Professor Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore is, of course, the epitome of wizardry: he is over 100 years old (born 1881, JK Rowling tells us), he has an impressively long silver mane of hair and an even more impressively long silver beard that he tucks into his belt, has a thing for thick, woollen socks and, naturally, he has an arsenal of powerful magic at his disposal. Richard Harris is probably remembered more for his role as Dumbledore than for his other more "serious" roles in films like Gladiator, in which he played Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Michael Gambon's the person we think about when think Dumbledore, though, as he played the character for a longer period of time and did a brilliant job of it. His name is now written in the scrolls of high mages in some dusty library and if he were to expire right now we would be proud of his magical achievement.



Gandalf

If I'm going to bother speaking of wizards at all I can't not mention Ian McKellen in his role as Gandalf in Peter Jackson's beautiful The Lord Of The Rings trilogy (don't tell JRR Tolkien that I used that term), a role he reprises in the much anticipated film, The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey, coming out later this year. The first thing that pops into many moviegoers' heads when we see Ian McKellen is Gandalf and his giant nose, and that makes us feel all fuzzy and squishy inside. There are those of us who think Magneto, the antagonistic and also admirable character he played in the X-Men movies. He also played Leigh Teabing in The Da Vinci Code, but I can't decide whether or not that earns him a tick in this here context.

## Dracula, Scaramanga and Saruman

Carrying on the wizardly trend in The Lord of the Rings is Christopher Lee (well known for playing Dracula and Bond villain, Francisco Scaramanga), playing the character of Saruman, whom we love to hate. The scene in which his "fell voice" is heard on the air as he attempts to bring down the mountain of Caradhras on the fellowship embodies the image of an evil wizard in my mind. Christopher Lee continues to have a good run in fantasy and science

fiction films, appearing in *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*, and *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* as the evil Count Dooku. He



Saruman

also voices the character of the Sith lord in 2008's animated *Star Wars* series, *The Clone Wars* and voices the Jabberwocky in Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. Like Ian McKellen he reprises his role as Saruman in the forthcoming *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*. And, thus, Christopher Lee's CV continues to grow longer than Saruman's wizardly beard.

Based on Marvel Studios' success, I feel the need to spare a thought for Stan Lee and the myriad of cameo appearances and the writing and producing credits he has. There are so many of these credits that I'm sure they just put his name in them, even if

he's just at home sleeping in his *Fantastic Four* PJs. But he gets a nod all the same.

## Enter Batman



Alfred Pennyworth

Staying in the realm of comic books, Batman had the ill fortune of losing his parents at a young age and, thus, he was raised by his butler, Alfred Pennyworth, who is his staunchest ally in his never-ending crusade against crime. I really wanted to talk more about Tony Stark's butler, Edwin Jarvis, too, but Marvel Studios decided that they're cool and went with the AI version of the beloved butler, J.A.R.V.I.S. (Just a Rather Very Intelligent System) for the movies instead. One of the coolest comic book moments for me is in Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch's *The Ultimates*, in which they refer to Alfred and Jarvis hanging out on weekends, even though they don't occupy the same universe. I like that image. It's also funny that Alfred's father is named Jarvis. I digress though, the person who matters right now is Michael Caine, who portrays Alfred's character in Christopher Nolan's *Batman* trilogy. Where does one start with this man's long list of films? Alfie, *Get Carter*, *The Man Who Would Be King*, his Oscar-winning performances in *Hannah And Her Sisters* and *The Cider House Rules*, *The Italian Job* (not the remake), *Inception* and many, many others beside. All that matters to us, though, is that he is Alfred in *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight* and on 20 July we see him in *The Dark Knight Rises*. That is all. Morgan Freeman and his long list of film credits also gets a nod as Lucious Fox in Nolan's *Batman* trilogy.

I've left out many elderly folk who are running around and being kick-ass and, for that, I apologise. The picture I'm painting is simply to outline that the rise of the nerds is changing the rules of who is considered cool and who isn't. Old people are cool right now, so much so that I wish I was 70. The last really cool thing on TV was the second season of *Game Of Thrones* and it's just crawling with old people being awesome. Young people had better watch out, our swag (100 people cringe) is being stolen from right under our pierced noses.

Anyhoo, July is coming and it's bringing with it two very delicious movies to look forward to and spot old folk in: *The Amazing Spider-Man* (13 July) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (20 July).

That is it. There is no more.

## ABOUT CHARLES SIBOTO

Charles Siboto is a delightful, youngish person. He firmly believes that kindness matters and cannot abide people who are asshats. View my profile and articles...